

STRATEGY

— *for* —

YOU



BUILDING *a* BRIDGE *to*
the LIFE YOU WANT

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INTRODUCTION

THE GREATEST DAY OF YOUR LIFE

*Recall yesterday,
think today,
envision tomorrow.*

One Saturday morning a couple of years ago, my five-year-old son, Luke, bounded down the stairs for breakfast, shouting, “Dad, are you ready for the greatest day of your life?”

Stunned by the enormity of the question, I enthusiastically replied, “Yes!” and he proceeded to outline exactly what that day would look like: making chocolate chip pancakes for breakfast, creating a new Thomas the Train track layout, hitting golf balls in the backyard, grilling cheese sandwiches for lunch, playing trucks in the sandbox, swinging on the swing set, watching *Cars*, grilling hot dogs for dinner, and to cap it all off, toasting marshmallows on the bonfire. Indeed, it would arguably be the greatest day of his young life.

We made our way through that beautiful spring day, cleaning pancake batter off the cabinets, searching for golf balls in the woods, burning the first of the grilled cheese sandwiches, and swinging higher and higher into the cloudless blue sky. Later that night, as we told ghost stories around the crackling bonfire, licking gooey marshmallows off our fingertips, Luke said, “We did it.”

“Did what?” I asked.

“Had the greatest day of our lives,” he replied.

And we had.

Whether it’s in your work or your personal life, the opportunity to envision and create your greatest days is within your reach. You can begin the journey by asking yourself two questions:

What would be the greatest day of my life?

How would I get there?

Strategy as a Bridge

Hiking through the woods, you come across a stream. It’s only a few feet deep and fewer than ten feet across. With several hours of hiking ahead, you’d like to continue on with dry feet. Fifty yards to the right, you notice a log resting across the stream, several feet above the water. You walk over and place your right foot on the log to test its steadiness. It appears sound, so you step onto the log with both feet and carefully walk across. Hopping off, you look back with a feeling of accomplishment before hiking on.

While it wasn’t a death-defying act—after all, you didn’t daringly cross a shaky structure hundreds of feet above roaring

white rapids—you did manage to get from where you were to where you wanted to go. And for thousands of years, bridges have helped people do just that. Natural or man-made, a bridge is a structure that spans and provides passage over a gap or barrier, such as a river or roadway. A bridge can be simple, like a basic wooden beam, or it can be complex, like a double-decked bridge. It can be short (e.g., a small covered bridge) or long (such as the record-setting Akashi Kaikyo Bridge in Japan, spanning 12,828 feet). It can be old and unstable, or it can be a breathtaking work of art.

In its simplest form, strategy is a bridge for getting from where you are today to where you want to go. Whether in business or in your personal life, strategy is how you plan to get from your current position to your desired goals. A bridge provides passage over a gap—something that's missing. For many of us, there are gaps in our lives—things that are missing, things that we'd like to have more of, such as more time with family and friends, more purposeful work, a healthier lifestyle, and greater spirituality. Strategy can help us fill those gaps.

A bridge also spans barriers. Think about the barriers you face, the obstacles and adversity—a difficult coworker, making your financial numbers at work, weakening relationships with your kids, high cholesterol, and so forth. Strategy can help us span and overcome these obstacles.

Depending on their design, most bridges have the following forces distributed throughout their structure: compression (pushing force), tension (pulling force), torsion (twisting of an object), and bending (turning in a particular direction). A

poorly designed bridge crumbles under these forces. A well-designed bridge intelligently blends these forces with one another to actually increase its strength and stability.

Like a bridge, a sound strategy for living blends these forces to enable us to withstand adversity and overcome challenges. Without a sound strategy for our lives, we allow all kinds of forces to push, pull, twist, and turn us into mental and emotional pretzels. Our inability to say “no” *pushes* us into time-wasting activities; a lack of strategic direction allows us to be *pulled* down a career path we never wanted; good intentions to volunteer in the community are *twisted* into negative comments when we’re not able to meet the time commitments; and we’re emotionally *turned* around when the relationship we let wither finally ends. With a solid strategy in place, however, we can harness the everyday forces to lead us where we want to go.

Without a strategy, we have no clear way to get to where we want to go. Without a strategy, we risk falling into the gaps and being held back by the barriers. Without a strategy, we are powerless to create the life we want. But *with* a strategy, there are no limits to how far our bridge can take us. We can build a bridge to the greatest days of our lives.

The Bridge to Nowhere

Think about where you are today. Do you enjoy your job? Is your mind active and fully engaged? Are you physically healthy? Are your finances solid? Are your relationships inspiring and supportive? Now think about the bridge that led you to your

current position. Was it planned and well thought-out, or was it more similar to Alaska's infamous Gravina Island Bridge, often referred to as the \$398 million "bridge to nowhere"?

The most common example I run into involves career satisfaction. When I ask people to trace the bridge of events leading up to their current job, it tends to go like this:

When I was finishing college, my dad had a friend who was the VP of sales for a paper company. Since I wasn't getting any real job opportunities from the on-campus recruiting, I interviewed with the paper company and took a job in sales. I worked there for three years and then received a call from a headhunter for a position with another paper company for \$10,000 more in salary. I moved over to that company in sales but was asked to take a position in customer service six months later when they eliminated a bunch of sales territories. Two years later, a friend of mine said her company was hiring for a position in IT that interfaced with customers and marketing. I interviewed and got the job, but I wound up doing mostly data entry for the marketing team. I'm nearly ten years into my career now and doing IT work I can't stand.

This story of an individual's bridge to nowhere would be amusing if it weren't so true. Think about it: The average working adult spends about fifty hours a week working and commuting

to work. Multiply those fifty hours by fifty weeks, and you have 2,500 hours a year that are potentially being wasted in a role that's either not fulfilling, not enjoyable, or both. Over the course of a career, that's more than 100,000 hours!

We all have resources to varying degrees, consisting of time, talent, and money. How we use those resources each day determines our level of happiness and success in four areas: Mind, Body, Relationships, and Finances. Are you investing your time in activities that keep your mind actively engaged? Are you investing your talent in work that is valued? Are you investing yourself in relationships that strengthen the bonds of family, friends, and colleagues? Are you investing finances to ensure longer-term prosperity?

A Gallup survey confirmed just how widespread the lack of individual strategy has become. Canvassing its database of 1.7 million employees, Gallup found that only 20 percent feel their jobs match up with their strengths.¹ That is, only two out of ten people believe they have an opportunity each day to do what they're best at. If we haven't planned to match our passions and strengths with our professional and personal lives, then we can only watch with regret as our days slip away like the grains of sand in an hourglass.

Strategy can save us.

In the world of business, strategy can make or break a company. Research by Paul Carroll and Chunka Mui, published in the *Harvard Business Review*, showed that the number one cause of bankruptcy is bad strategy.² Companies of all shapes and sizes have closed their doors because they didn't have a plan for

success—particularly in economic downturns. If you don't have a strategic plan today, you may not have a business tomorrow.

The same holds true for individuals. *Sports Illustrated* reported that 60 percent of professional basketball players are in serious financial trouble within five years of retirement, despite earning millions of dollars a year while they held that job.³ According to Yahoo! Sports, Scottie Pippen, named one of the top fifty NBA players of all time, lost his career earnings of \$120 million in bad investments.⁴ Still think having lots of money protects you from personal bankruptcy? The sobering fact remains, if you don't have a strategy, you may not have a future—at least, not the one you want.

A Plan (or Not) for Life

To determine how effectively people are planning for successful lives, I conducted research in partnership with Harris Interactive, involving 2,257 adults of all ages, from eighteen to fifty-five-plus years old, from across the United States. Participants' educational backgrounds varied, from incomplete high school to postgraduate college degrees, and incomes ranged from less than \$35,000 per year to greater than \$75,000 per year. The study found only 15 percent of adults have a written plan for their life that outlines their goals and the strategies for achieving them. Based on this representative sample, we can conclude that fewer than two out of every ten Americans have a plan for their life.

I conducted a second study, involving more than three hundred Fortune 1000 business executives, to see if the practice

of developing a strategic plan for their business carried over to their personal lives. These leaders consisted of chief executives, presidents, executive directors, general managers, and vice presidents representing more than twenty-five industries across the United States. When asked the question “Do you have a written strategic plan for your business?” 82 percent of executives responded “yes.” However, when faced with the question “Do you have a written strategic plan for your life?” only 22 percent responded “yes.”

Data has shown that organizations without a sound strategy go bankrupt. In the long run, they fail. Despite the overwhelming evidence that a business needs a strong strategic plan to survive, by far the majority of people working in business haven’t applied those same strategy principles for success to their personal lives. Why? No one has ever shown them how.

Strategy Defined

Do you remember the first time you fell in love? Can you describe the feeling? A quickening heart beat, flushing cheeks, butterflies in the stomach, a tingling throughout the body. All good descriptors. But can you *define* love? A concrete definition is more difficult. Why? Because love is an abstract concept. We can’t reach out and touch it. It’s intangible.

The same can be said for strategy. Just like love or leadership, strategy is an abstract, intangible concept. Defining it is difficult. However, if we’re going to embark on a system for developing strategy for our lives, we’ll need a common understanding of what it means:

Strategy is a plan for using your resources—time, talent, and money—to achieve your goals.

Strategy is how we get from where we are today to where we want to be in the future—to the achievement of our goals. As discussed earlier, strategy is a bridge, taking us from one point to the next, spanning gaps and helping us to pass over barriers. It can enable us to reach our full potential in terms of our mind, our body, our relationships, and our finances.

Let's break down the pieces of the definition even further.

“STRATEGY IS A PLAN . . .”

Strategy doesn't just happen. A plan requires thinking, and thinking requires us to invest time in considering what we want to achieve (our goal) and how to go about doing it (our strategy).

“. . . FOR USING YOUR RESOURCES—TIME, TALENT, AND MONEY . . .”

From both a business and a personal perspective, we all have resources—time, talent, and money—to varying degrees. How effectively we use, or allocate, our resources determines how effective, successful, and happy we'll be.

“. . . TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS.”

A *goal* is what we're trying to achieve; it's the general target. Before we can ever set a strategy, we first need to understand exactly what it is we want to achieve. Just as you couldn't build

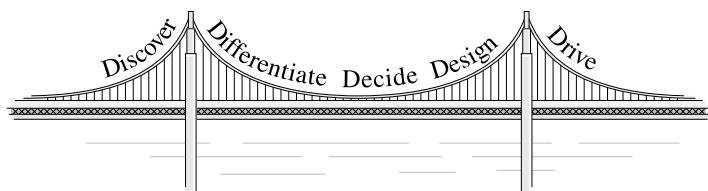
a bridge without first determining where it must lead, you can't develop a strategy for your life without first understanding where it is you want to go.

The Five-Step Plan

My work as a business strategist is to help managers develop the strategies that will, in essence, create the bridge to their greatest business performance. During the past ten years working as a chief strategy officer and founder of the Strategic Thinking Institute, I developed tools and frameworks to help multimillion- and even multibillion-dollar organizations identify their business goals and the strategies for reaching them. I had never, however, helped people apply these business strategy principles for success in their individual lives—until now.

Strategy for You is intended to provide you with a five-step plan for creating a bridge to the life you want. It is unlike other books in that it takes the foundational principles of business strategy and helps you apply them to your life. The result is a simple plan you can follow to become effective, successful, and happy at work and at home.

The *Strategy for You* five-step plan includes the following elements:



STEP 1: DISCOVER—SELECTING YOUR BRIDGE'S LOCATION

Just as you can't build a bridge without first determining the starting and finishing points, you can't build a strategy for your life without understanding where you're starting from and where you want to go. The Discover step is the process of uncovering your purpose—what you want and why. Purpose takes the form of a mission, a vision, goals, and objectives.

STEP 2: DIFFERENTIATE—IMAGINING YOUR BRIDGE'S STYLE

Bridges come in all shapes and sizes, from small, wooden covered structures to shiny, sweeping waves of metal. Their differences begin in the mind of the designer. The Differentiate step requires you to identify the unique characteristics of your personal bridge. These elements include your individual combination of strengths, weaknesses, background, and abilities that set you apart from the pack. To *differentiate* means to deviate from the norm in ways that people value.

STEP 3: DECIDE—CHOOSING YOUR BRIDGE'S MATERIALS

Before a bridge can be built, the designer must decide which materials to use, based on functional needs, the size of the span to be crossed, and desired aesthetics. All these choices require trade-offs. The Decide step involves the process of allocating your resources—time, talent, and money—to achieve your goals. The act of deciding requires you to make trade-offs, choosing what to do and what *not* to do.

STEP 4: DESIGN—BUILDING YOUR BRIDGE

It's one thing to think about a bridge. It's another to actually build that bridge. While natural bridges like logs over streams exist, the majority of functional bridges are man-made. The Design step asks you to develop an action plan that will help you reach the goals you've set, using the appropriate resources. Just as a designer creates a blueprint for a bridge, we can design a StrategyPrint for life.

STEP 5: DRIVE—CROSSING YOUR BRIDGE

Once the bridge has been designed and built, the true test begins. Can you move across this bridge, from one side to the other? A bridge that looks good but crumbles when used is of little value. The Drive step guides your actions and moves you forward on a daily basis according to the strategy you have designed. It includes the ability to execute your plan without becoming distracted and taken off task by "urgent" but unimportant things that eat away at your time.

In each chapter you'll see a "Bridge in Progress" sign that features a story from someone who, in building his or her strategy bridge, has faced the challenges related to that step. At the end of each chapter is a section called "Bridgework Ahead," which enables you to follow the steps for building your bridge, or strategy, by completing the exercises described in the chapter. Following the Bridgework Ahead section is a "Construction Summary" that provides a brief review of the key concepts and tools from the chapter.

What is unique about *Strategy for You*? It is built on a set of universal business strategy principles and tools that have been tailored to another purpose: developing strategy for all the areas of your life. Thinking strategically about your life requires a framework, tools, and discipline. I'll provide the first two. Are you ready to bring the third?

